



DECISION MEMO



WHITE BEAVER SALVAGE

USDA Forest Service, Clearwater National Forest
Powell Ranger District
Idaho County, Idaho

INTRODUCTION

The Powell Ranger District of the Clearwater National Forest is proposing a timber salvage harvest project to promote the growth of White Bark Pine.

LOCATION

The Powell Ranger District of the Clearwater National Forest is proposing forest management activities that would improve whitebark pine in the White Beaver project area. This project area encompasses approximately 30 acres along Beaver Ridge in the Storm Creek drainage portions of Sections 7, 8, 17 and 18, Township 37N, Range 16E, Idaho County, Idaho. The area is accessed by forest roads 368 and 369, as shown on the attached map.

The proposed action is located in Forest Plan Management Area E1 (Timber). The E1 Management Area consists of timber producing land to be managed for healthy timber stands to provide optimum, sustained production of wood products. Timber production is to be cost effective and provide protection of soil, water quality and wildlife resources.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Vegetation Improvement **Purpose:**

- Prevent/slow Mountain pine beetle infestations
- Restore whitebark pine in selected areas suited to their establishment and growth, using methods appropriate to the undeveloped character of its habitat.
- Release immature whitebark pine by removing the surrounding competing species
- Encourage natural regeneration around mature cone-producing whitebark pine.
- Protect existing whitebark pine plus trees and cone production trees.

Need: Whitebark pine cone collection and cone production trees represent significant time and financial investment that cannot easily be replaced. The areas proposed for treatment are dominated by homogenous stands of lodge pole pine of similar age located adjacent to the whitebark pine stands. Homogenous stands are less resilient to disturbances such as insects, disease and fire and these areas are slowly declining in health and vigor. There is a need to reduce the lodge pole pine component due to increased pine beetle mortality following the Powell SBW Complex fires. Reducing the lodgepole pine stand density would improve the resiliency of the whitebark pine to withstand the effects of fire and potential insects and disease outbreaks. This would also allow for the establishment of whitebark pine by reducing competition from surrounding species.

Goods and Services

Purpose:

- To provide goods and services important to society and recover the economic value of dead and dying trees.

Need: Lodgepole pine stands dominate much of the project area. Mountain pine beetle infestations are contributing to increased mortality in the area. There is a need to capture the commercial value of the timber in infested stands before it is lost due to mortality and decay. Harvest of the timber would provide materials to local industries consistent with forest plan direction.

PROPOSED ACTION

The White Beaver project area consists of three treatment areas totaling approximately 30 acres in small diameter (6-9inch DBH) lodge pole pine stands at high risk of mountain pine beetle infestation resulting from the fires of 2012. Treatment activities include tractor logging groups of trees up to two acres in size to create openings for White Bark Pine reforestation. Clumps of trees and down wood will be left for long term soil nutrient and wildlife habitat. No roads will be built; logs will be brought down a skid trail to the main road. Post-harvest activities include slash treatment, pile burning and planting of white bark pine throughout all treated areas.

DESIGN CRITERIA AND/OR MITIGATION

Design features are used to minimize the environmental impacts of the proposed actions. Included are Regional and Clearwater NF standards, guidelines and policies designed to address resource management concerns.

1. Cultural resource surveys have been completed. No known cultural sites are located within the area proposed for harvest. However, if additional cultural sites are discovered during implementation, provisions within the timber sale contract (C6.24; "Protection of Cultural Resources") to ensure cultural resource protection would be enacted.
2. Standard PACFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA) would be applied.
3. Soil and Water Conservation Practices, or Best Management Practices (BMPs), would be applied to all proposed harvest and fuel reduction activities. A list of BMPs that would be applied for this project is contained in the Water/Soils Section of the project file (Doc. 12007, p.3). Application of BMPs would follow the guidance in the Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook (Forest Service Handbook 2509.22).
4. No harvest activity would occur within riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCA).
5. Within the harvest area, retain 2-5 tons per acre of down course woody debris to maintain long term soil productivity.
6. Skid trails will be closed following use; slash will be scattered on the exposed soil to stabilize soil and prevent vehicle access.
7. Sensitive areas of exposed soil will be seeded and fertilized following harvest activities in the area.

8. All off-road logging equipment will be cleaned of dirt and plant parts prior to entering the sale area per contract provision C6.351.
9. All exposed soil on skid trails and landings will be seeded with certified weed-free seed following harvest activities.
10. The Forest Service will continue to monitor/survey project area for new invader weed species.
11. Tree reforestation will be promoted to reduce long term noxious weed colonization.
12. Within the harvest area, retain 2-5 tons per acre down course woody debris to maintain an endemic level of black-backed woodpecker forage habitat and for snowshoe hare habitat as part of the Lynx conservation strategy and to maintain long term soil productivity.
13. Within the harvested area, retain 12 trees per acre including all trees greater than 20" dbh. for black-backed woodpecker nesting habitat, future lynx denning, and future large woody debris recruitment.
14. All areas, 1 acre or larger of multi-storied snowshoe hare habitat shall be left intact within the harvest units.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Forest Service conducted public scoping to identify any concerns with the White Beaver Salvage proposed action. The project was listed in the summer 2013 Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). A notice describing the project and soliciting comments was placed in the Lewiston Morning Tribune of Lewiston, Idaho on June 06, 2013. Consultation was initiated with the Nez Perce Tribe on June 6, 2013. Scoping notices were also sent to the County Commissioners, federal and state agencies, and interested individuals on June 6, 2013. In addition, this project was listed on the Clearwater National Forest website (www.fs.fed.us/r1/clearwater). One response was received from the June 2013 scoping.

CONSISTENCY WITH FOREST PLAN

The proposed activity is within Forest Plan Management Area E1 (Timber Management). The following outlines how the proposed action meets Forest Plan standards:

1. Cost effectiveness – The project has a positive appraised value, which is an indicator of timber sales that would sell and provide jobs to the community.
2. Soil – The project would not have an effect on soil stability or productivity.
3. Water Quality – The proposed action would not have an affect on water temperature or water and sediment yield.
4. Wildlife – The proposed action would not change elk summer habitat effectiveness or winter range. It would not affect habitat for management indicator species. It would not harvest or otherwise impact any old growth.
5. Fish – No fish bearing streams are located in the project area. Default PACFISH buffers would be implemented to prevent downstream impacts to fish.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

After review of the Biological Assessment (BA) and Biological Evaluation (BE) , documents in the project file, and specialist reports, I have determined that the proposed action is consistent with the Forest Plan and that there are no extraordinary circumstances that indicate a presence of possible significant effects. The following outlines extraordinary circumstances and how they affect this project.

- a. **Threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat.** Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects have been analyzed in the BA. Findings in the BA show implementation of the proposed action would have *no effect* on the bald eagle, Canada Lynx, Fall Chinook Salmon, Steelhead Trout, and Bull Trout. Implementation of the proposed action *will not affect the viability or jeopardize the continued existence* of the gray wolf.
- c. **Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds or impaired water bodies.** Site review by the Interdisciplinary Hydrologist confirmed the project area is not located in, or will not affect any floodplain, wetland, or municipal watershed or impaired water bodies.
- d. **Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas.** The proposed harvest site is not located within any congressionally designated protection area.
- e. **Inventoried roadless areas.** The Area to be harvested is not located in roadless, but is separated by a main road from roadless. No harvest will take place in the roadless area.
- f. **Research Natural Areas.** The proposed treatment area does not include land designated as a Research Natural Area.
- g. **Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.** A cultural resource overview and field survey was completed for this project. No known cultural sites were identified within the area proposed for harvest.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

National Historic Preservation Act: No cultural resources would be adversely affected by the proposed action. Cultural resources have been surveyed and no sites were found. If any sites are identified during project implementation, activity would cease and the District Archaeologist would be consulted.

Endangered Species Act: The proposed action was reviewed with regard to the Endangered Species Act as documented in the Biological Assessment (BA) (see Appendix B). The BA found implementation of the proposed action will have *no effect* on the north American wolverine, yellow-billed cuckoo or Canada Lynx.

Sensitive Species: The proposed action was also reviewed in regard to Sensitive Species as documented in the Biological Evaluation (BE) (see Appendix B). The BE found implementation of the proposed action will have *no impact* on sensitive species.

Inland Native Fish Strategy (PACFISH): All activities associated with the proposed action comply with PACFISH.

National Forest Management Act Requirements for Vegetation Manipulation: The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and accompanying regulations require that several specific findings be documented at the project level. All proposals that involve vegetation manipulation of tree cover for any purpose must comply with the requirements found in 36 CFR 219.27(b). The proposed activity complies with NFMA by meeting multi-resource objectives and limiting harvest to areas suitable for growing timber, which was validated by the Interdisciplinary Team's silviculturist and soils specialist.

Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Laws: The Interdisciplinary Team Hydrologist has determined that this project complies with the Clean Water Act, state water quality laws, and would protect beneficial uses. No designated water quality limited stream segments are located within the project area.

Environmental Justice: I assessed the proposed action to determine whether it would disproportionately impact Tribal members, minority or low-income populations, in accordance with Executive Order 12898. No disproportionate impacts to Tribal members, minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or the effects analysis.

American Indian Rights

Consultation with the Nez Perce Tribe has been completed. No areas of cultural significance were identified.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

I find that there are no known substantial losses of migratory bird habitat expected from the implementation of this proposal.

Idaho Forest Practices Compliance: The Idaho Department of Lands will be notified when harvest activities begin. The Forest Service Sale Administrator will ensure compliance with Best Management Practices.

Other Laws or Requirements: The proposed action is consistent with all other known Federal, State, or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment and cultural resources.

DECISION

I have decided to approve the proposed action with the design criteria and mitigation measures listed above. I have considered the potential for direct and indirect effects and concluded that the proposed action would not significantly affect the surrounding resources in context or intensity. The rationale for my decision is based on: 1) the proposed action fully meeting the purpose and need, 2) the minimal environmental change expected, 3) the findings related to extraordinary circumstances, 4) the project's consistency with regulatory framework, 5) on-the-ground review and discussion with District resource specialists, 6) review of the Biological Assessment (BA) and Biological Evaluation (BE), and 7) review of completed projects on the Forest with similar

prescriptions; based on field reviews, these projects have had no direct or indirect resource effects.

In addition to the above, I have considered the potential for cumulative effects and have determined that there would be no cumulative effects. All the specialists on the IDT reviewed past, current and proposed activities as well as the monitoring and mitigation pertinent to this proposal and documented in their reports that no cumulative effects would result from implementing the proposed action. This information is documented in the project file.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1507.3 provide that agencies may, after notice and comment, adopt categories of actions that do not normally have significant impacts on the human environment and that do not require preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS). It is my determination that the proposed action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, because it does not have any extraordinary circumstances and meets all the criteria outlined in Category 14 of Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2 (PF; Doc. 1003, 22001, 22002).

Category 14 of the Category Exclusion process allows sanitation harvest of trees to control insects or disease not to exceed 250 acres.

This category allows salvage harvest in areas where trees have been severely damaged by forces, such as fire, wind, ice, insects, or disease and still have some economic value. The White Beaver Salvage project will conduct salvage of bug infested timber on approximately 30 acres.

APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215, as clarified in the court order dated October 19, 2005 by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the *Lewiston Tribune*, Lewiston, Idaho. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Paper appeals must be submitted to:

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807

or

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
200 East Broadway

Missoula, MT 59802
Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Electronic appeals must be submitted to: *appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us*
In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received. Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why my decision should be reversed. The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and include the following information:

- The appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
- A signature, or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
- When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
- The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
- The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251, subpart C;
- Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
- Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
- Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
- How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

"If an appeal is received on this project there may be informal resolution meetings and/or conference calls between the Responsible Official and the appellant. These discussions would take place within 15 days after the closing date for filing an appeal. All such meetings are open to the public. If you are interested in attending any informal resolution discussions, please contact the Responsible Official or monitor the following website for postings about current appeals in the Northern Region of the Forest Service:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/projects/appeal_index.shtml."

IMPLEMENTATION

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

CONTACT PERSON

For further information about this decision please contact Amy Larson, Project Interdisciplinary Team leader, Lochsa Ranger Station, 502 Lowry Street, Kooskia, ID 83539 or by phone 208-926-6431.

SIGNATURE OF DECIDING OFFICER

/s/ Craig Trulock

September 9, 2013

CRAIG TRULOCK
District Ranger

Date

Enclosures:

- Appendix A – Project Map
- Appendix B – Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation
- Appendix C – Response to Public Comment

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